

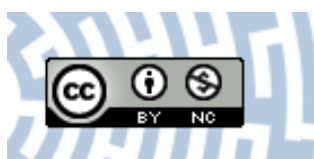


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The Nonethical Aspect of Childhood and Youth. A Theoretical and Praxeological Study of the Atmosphere of Upbringing

Abstract

The article points at the sense-productive meaning of the life affirming attitude in the development of a young person. It argues that the true respect for life and its essential mysteries is a natural way of counteracting criminality as well as different forms of life negation, such as self-destruction in neuroses, psychological disorders or suicidal attempts. Upbringing in the affirmation of life – in a global scale – may be a preventing measure against human degeneration, which takes place as a result of uncontrolled genetic and molecular experiments and deterioration of natural environment. In the praxeological part of the article, which discusses selected aspects of the system of the upbringing of children and teenagers in a life-affirming atmosphere, life is predominantly understood as a factor moulding the world to preserve traditional human values. It is an attractive proposition for primary school teachers as well as junior high and senior high school educators. Teachers' reflection on the moral perfection criteria, personality patterns and upbringing ideals makes it possible to revive the authority of the teacher as a promoter of axiologically mature forms of life affirmation in the educational environment.

Key words: *eudaimonology, atmosphere of upbringing, life affirming attitude, life negation, nonethical values.*

Introduction

Theoretical assumptions of edaimonology in the contemporary social and scientific understanding often constitute an appealing illusion about bringing happi-

ness to the masses, well known from such works as *Utopia* by Thomas Moore, Jeremiah Bentham's eudaimonics and the literary output of other utilitarian authors. The ancient epicurean hedonism, James Mill and John Stuart Mill's philosophy represent hedonistic utilitarianism where the highest value is attached to common happiness, i.e. the greatest happiness for as many individuals as possible (Hostyński, 1998: 22).

In order to resist the wave of individualism, not only ethics but also pedagogy should put in order their relations with the ancient eudaimonism, hedonistic and utilitarian schools and especially with ethical and psychological hedonism. It should also redefine utilitarianism and utilitarian ideas and, most of all, change the way it perceives eudaimonology itself. Theoretical and methodological premises of upbringing in the affirmation of life should include verification of modern nihilistic and existential tendencies.

If upbringing in the affirmation of life is to function as an efficient educational system, it needs to re-discuss the question of decreasing the meaning of the joyful aspect of life, focusing on appreciating moral obligation, including the privilege to enjoy life. In fact, the term "pleasure" is incidental and only supplementary to terms like e.g. the axiological meaning, from which the ethically justified life affirming attitude stems.

The proposition of upbringing in the affirmation of life should be introduced into contemporary society, which can be referred to as "neo-utilitarian", with special care and responsibility, as nothing causes more life negation than the very hedonistic utilitarianism, especially when it demonizes the significance of material goods (hedonistic materialism). Affirmation of life, in human axiological experience, does not remain carefree happiness or a kind of bliss. It rather becomes a conscious movement from the painful hardship of life, through overcoming existential anxieties and back again to attachment to life with accepting kindness for its specificity. Maintaining cheerfulness in the face of the worst fate reveals the true axiological maturity of a human being and the strength of his or her personal values, which lie at the basis of human dignity.

The true affirmation of life, in my opinion, elevates human life beyond any temporality of existence. It is something which, in essence, transgresses regular "smile of fate" as well as nihilism that requires no effort at all. Happiness must be reached through determined albeit still ethically justified action. Only then will true affirmation of life become the "Promethean Flame of Mankind", the art of life that has the power to genuinely satisfy all human beings.

Special rights of a human being to affirm moral values

First of all, an individual has a right to affirm moral values, simply speaking, to enjoy “meaningful life” or “meaning-generating life”. It must be borne in mind that it is the humanist values, especially the ones which find their fulfilment in the process of life, that are an eternal source of fascination for a human being. There is a certain set of values characteristic of each epoch, which matters not because of the values themselves, but because the values are carefully selected as regards their fundamental categories. It is not the fundamental characteristics of this set of values, however, that are essential for the nature of man. It is rather the fact that an individual feels the need, or even obligation, to hold or learn about values, and sometimes, if at all practicable, to introduce them into their own surroundings.

Whenever experiencing the values directly and intuitively proves impossible, any time satisfaction related to this experience eludes us, we may become extremely unhappy. What makes us happy is the realisation of the values, as if we remained under their peculiar charm. Interestingly, the values related to our vital needs (e.g. food) or pleasures (e.g. good health) are not of paramount importance here. What really matters are the values of immanent and absolute quality, even though their realisation depends on the creative power of a human being; briefly speaking: moral and aesthetic values (Ingarden, 1987; pp. 22, 23). A human being feels happy when aware of the presence of values created by themselves or by their relatives. This peculiarly human reality is more permanent than the life of an individual and constitutes a certain kind of heritage for every one of us. This heritage, an heirloom from our ancestors, also manifests itself as the revival of certain historical epochs. Nevertheless, complete satisfaction derives from the fact that we succeeded in creating values that bear the mark of our personality (Adamski 1993; pp. 40, 41).

The values that secure humanity may be considered potentially happiness-generating. Good, justice, wisdom, responsibility, they seem to have immanent felicitological power. It means that a human being finds unparalleled joy in good, justice and responsibility as well as in courage, authenticity or generosity. These axiological entities make human life definitely affirmative due to their sense-generating characteristics.

“Kindness and charity form two pillars of virtuous minds and characters, possessing the sense of duty. Those qualities are more than direct joy connected with activity. It becomes clear that it is the nobleness that makes us happy” (Garwe, 2002; pp. 90, 91). The idea of enlightenment proposed by the philosopher Christian Garwe seems to be similar to Władysław Tatarkiewicz’s idea of happiness. Tatarkiewicz suggests that we should not try directly to obtain happiness.

Happiness results from the realisation of other values: moral, cognitive and aesthetical, all of which constitute the qualities forming the idea of perfection. Happiness is resultant in relation to yet other values, namely vital and natural ones, as well as material values, the significance of which we do not, just like other ethicists, overestimate. Happy life is something more than a good or perfect life. For the author of the treaty *About happiness*, morality seems to be a factor of special importance, though not the only one, for obtaining happiness. Moreover, morality is not tantamount to happiness (Wiśniewski, 1989; p. 310).

The belief that happiness is a side-effect of affirming other values (Styczeń, 1980) is similar to the conviction that moral flawlessness automatically brings happiness. Human experience does not support such a relation at all. Furthermore, such a belief might result in the underestimating of the upbringing in the affirmation of life. It is not about turning it into a fetish but about the recognition of its axiological range and certain praxeological importance.

Antinomy of affirmation and negation in the existence and upbringing of an individual

Experiencing happiness is characterized by a special kind of dynamics. As the experience progresses it seeks new forms of fulfilment, it is a force with a tendency to push forward, deprived of clearly marked limits. At the same time, it is constantly opposed by different kinds of frustration.

Reciprocal proportions of experiencing happiness and frustration are different when experienced by certain individuals. Human life is a constant fluctuation between happy and miserable moments. Even particular successes or general well-being do not save us from the tormenting feelings of discouragement, suffering, disappointment or sadness. Meanwhile, regardless of the general balance of our life, i.e. whether we are close to some optimal state, in which the feeling of frustration has been sufficiently suppressed to be of negligible significance or whether quite the opposite is the case and we seem utterly incapable of recovering from a series of traumatic experiences, the desire to be happy is lost in the existential finale in non-existence (Ślipko 1984; pp. 77, 78). The grandeur of human personality is then manifested in the “drawing of the final curtain on one’s life” with “royal mood and cheerfulness” (Stróżewski, 2002; p. 25), without anticipating the irrevocable existential facts, such as death, with a desperate act of self-termination.

What position should we then assume on the antinomy of happiness and frustration that is a burden of human existence? This question poses one of the formulas of eudaimonological issues. Unfortunately, more often than not philosophy ignores

this problem, thus giving us an indirect proof of being separated from an individual human being and of being incapable of addressing our fundamental anxieties. Immanuel Kant was not the only one who claimed that the problem of happiness should be discussed beyond pure ethics; anyone desiring to delve into ethics should consciously disregard the issue of happiness.

All varieties of eudaimonism may deform the essence of morality because morality is mainly an affirmation of our dignity for its own sake. Eudaimonism, treating pleasure or one's own perfection as the only subject for morality, allows for a possibility to manipulate with human dignity. A discipline defined this way, being rather a psychology of human aspirations or a technology of a happy life, has nothing in common with ethics, which is based on a fact considered in a given moral experience.

Upbringing in the affirmation of life is an attempt to emancipate important humanist categories, such as: amazement and astonishment with life, delight and joy of life, cheerfulness, enthusiasm from "pillory" of ethical and psychological hedonism. The moral and educational strength of the aforementioned ideas requires that the affirmation of life be recognized as an important personality-developing and therapeutic factor and the basis for individual and social transgression.

Affirmation of life – a criterion of moral perfection, personality pattern and the ideal of upbringing

A model of a human being and an ideal of upbringing worth aiming at cannot exist without such an axiological quality as affirmation.

Maria Ossowska describes the personality pattern of an individual living in a democratic society by means of, among other things, felicitological terminology. A sense of humour is described as ubiquitous in the process of creating ethics on good co-existence among people. "May our new future man possess this ability by means of which Aristotle tried to define man: may man be able to laugh" (Smoczyński, 1987; p. 349). The Club of Rome report suggests that we should take joy of life as a criterion of authenticity and usefulness in upbringing.

It is hard to deny that the joy of life is, by the same token, a result of a well-implemented process of upbringing and a manifestation of emotional and social maturity of a human being. As a matter of fact, only a mentally mature individual is able to experience ethically correct and relatively permanent affirmation of life. As a criterion of perfect personality, joy of life constitutes substantial proof of partial or complete success achieved in the "art of life", the greatest and true achievement of a human being, a response on the part of human personality to productive ori-

entation to the world and oneself (Fromm 1996; p. 157). Positive upbringing of young generations evokes interest in introception of felicitological values, i.e. turning of the declared values into behavioural patterns and life affirmation, which greatly enhance our ability to successfully seek the meaning and fullness of life.

I am fully convinced that modern upbringing in the affirmation of life as a conception of shaping a dignified, and thus happy life, may greatly contribute to theoretical resources of pedagogy. The pedagogy of the affirmation of life demonstrates that a contemporary human being makes a mistake seeking pleasure before caring for other people and disregarding the common wisdom of life. Because of that, in my research, I explore the problem of creating a moral basis as a core for the foundation of the attitude of the affirmation of life. I discuss the problem of the ontological and epistemological meaning of positive life inclination as well as threats to the affirmation of life in the techno-centric civilisation. I also explore the quality of the mentioned emotional and moral phenomena in various educational environments as well as the phenomena from the field of felicitological scholology, pedeutology and axiological auto-therapy. The syntony between these terms from the borderline between pedagogy and philosophy allows both the disciplines to develop dynamically and maintain continuity of the centuries-old roots of science. The unity of science, as the beyond-division rule of all scientific inquiries, is revealed by this kind of partnership. Interdisciplinary unity may also apply to a certain kind of scientists' alliance formed to facilitate the task of creating auspicious human history and preserving humanist values.

Lying at the very foundation of human existence is the affirmation of the process of existence and the ability to save oneself from susceptibility to nihilism. Because of our love of human entity, we adore and protect our love of life by means of a proper process of upbringing.

Ecoethics of the affirmation of life – natural prevention of decadent attitudes

The proecological attitude towards respect for life constitutes human dedication to all living existence with which a person may come into contact. Only a human being can be truly ethical, as Albert Schweitzer suggestively convinces. He argues that one should help every life form one can support and he shrinks from doing harm to any living being. Life as such is sacred for him so he experiences the desire to show respect to any will of life, such as one's own. He follows the rule of supporting physical and spiritual human life and working for the development of its greatest values. If he works by lamp-light in the summer, he would rather close the

window and breathe the stuffy indoor air than look as one insect after another falls onto the table with its wings burnt. If he walks by an insect drowning in a puddle, he will sacrifice a minute to give it a blade of grass to help it out. He is not afraid of being laughed at for being sentimental. The time will come, however, when an individual will be amazed that mankind needed such a long time to understand that ethics will never come to terms with such mindless destruction of life. Compassion is too narrow a term to be considered the essence of being ethical; it only pertains to co-experiencing suffering with another being. Ethics is a widely understood responsibility for everything that is alive, it is dedicating oneself to life motivated by love and reverence towards life (Lazari-Pawłowska, 1976; pp. 184, 185).

In the Polish education system the biological understanding of life has come to dominate over all of its other aspects. The contemporary youth is shaped in order to be able to name as many animal and plant species as possible, to know the biological characteristics of life or even theories about the origin of life on the Earth. However, neither school nor family life teaches them how to be able to notice the phenomenal quality or how to experience the feeling of respect, astonishment, amazement or gratitude connected with e.g. charming places.

Even though the science of man being included in a Darwinian fashion in a long chain of living beings promises an optimistic unity of man and lesser organisms, it still does not incorporate any aspects of “phenomenology of humanity”. Equally ignored are the essential qualities of human beings, the very qualities that have made it possible for us to exist in relatively high quality over thousands of years and that have guided us through the greatest inner and historical troubles. The crucial task of “phenomenology of humanity” would not be to explain the way the human being dominates over other life forms but to show how great responsibility we have been entrusted with as regards the life of other beings.

Practising the idea of the affirmation of life in pedagogy

The escalation of such social threats as: suicidal attempts, escapism into addictions as a form of deceptive substitutes of the true youthful joy of life, the orphan's disease as a result of a seriously hurt childhood, depression that is a problem of a constantly growing number of children and teenagers are all important global problems. Their effects can be noticed not only as rising criminality rates but also as very disturbing disorders in mental health of the contemporary school teenagers.

Experiencing satisfaction that stems from doing good and assuming the right life attitudes becomes an essential factor in upbringing in the affirmation of life. Significant reinforcement coming from the natural environment and other people

constitutes a factor that improves the implementation of positive evaluating inclination among children and teenagers. Only truly cheerful school education, fully approved by children, can neutralise the shortage of human life acceptance in the family and peer environments.

It is not our intention to suggest that school children should be lectured on how to procure joy of life; rather, a type of therapeutic contact between an educator and the youth in the Socratic or Korczak-like fashion should be established. One needs a bit of creativity in building the right atmosphere for education and the form of lesson that will not be associated by students with conventional classes. The curriculum itself or the knowledge about generally human values should not become the highest priority. The teacher's individual and personalized attitude towards students, similar to academic relations, combined with faith in the student's integrity and deeply embedded attachment to the democratic values of social norms of cooperation, can bear promising educational fruit. The axiological development of students, inspired by experiencing a great many positive educational situations, heralds a surprising bloom of their intellectual life and, most of all, enhances their aspirations of creativity.

The promoters of the idea of the upbringing in the affirmation of life do not have to avoid innovative ideas of scholology, nor do they have to avoid experimenting in the field of individual creativity. Teachers can be encouraged not to hesitate to teach outside the school's walls in the so-called educational network (cultural objects) and in the natural environment. I assume that constructive recreation, bringing relaxation to the human nervous system, paves the way for assimilation of knowledge and obtaining the aims of education. Activating methodology, improving children's and teenagers' intellectual and emotional self-dependence, will undoubtedly lead them to feel satisfaction from their own successes. It will also stimulate transgressive communicative tendencies.

This is a list of several ideas or topics presented generally in the classroom:

- In small groups students make a film (using a small camera) on a certain topic, e.g. "Having a decent life – the most important of human careers", "Youth and eternity – like husband and wife", "Life, moving upward or forward?", "To have or to live, to live or to be?",
- NA drama – playing one scene from the book chosen by the students (the exercise includes preparation of the scenario, props, costumes and creating the appropriate atmosphere),
- Simulation entitled "shop with what you cannot buy" (probing the students' demand for humanist values)
- Symbolism of life: discussing and explaining the symbols of life (water, the Sun, light, candle, tree, the colour green, an infant, mother). A literature

workshop that would focus on a chosen symbol can be suggested. The task of the students will be to find and present or interpret the works on a given topic from using a poem or a novel.

- A competition/didactic game: “the reasons for and consequences of life” (the students are given a month to prepare any kind of artwork about a given topic. It could be: a piece of poetry, a song, a satire, a sculpture, a poster, a picture, a fresco, any self-made object associated with the topic, a school newspaper article, a costume, something embroidered or knitted, tapestry, a photography, pantomime etc.),
- “This life is worth living” – presenting an optimal number of arguments to support such a thesis. Students try to convince their teacher who personalises a person in despair and tries to give counterarguments.
- “I am worthy of life” – a metaplan,
- “Life – a sanctuary” – working in order to improve the condition of the natural environment, using the ideas suggested by the students (e.g. a report on the condition of a nearby river, a presentation about every-day ecology for the local community, tidying up the neighbourhood),
- Workshops: “The paper universe” – using only large sheets of soft grey paper the students have to express their own feelings they experience when the teacher says: fulfilled and unfulfilled life, my own and somebody else’s life, inner and external life, happy and miserable life etc.,
- Discussion. Sitting in circle, students talk about the topics chosen from the following: life as: a task, a process, a phenomenon, a gift, a miracle, an obligation, a value, a mystery, a challenge, a stage, an idea, a fact, strength, hope,
- Propositions of topics to discuss: “Life, what should one do with it?”, What does it mean to live life, to experience life, to accept life, to use life, to curse life, to learn life, to tame life, to reform life, to change life, to enjoy life, to waste life, to be delighted with life, to rectify life, to lose life, to be bored with life, to be tired of life, to embrace life, to give life,
- “The gallery of the world’s wisdom” – the attitude of the affirmation of life as emanation and absorption of good and beauty of the world – students’ texts and “golden thoughts” presented as a gallery (for example in a school’s corridor),
- “The three generations fairground” – summertime meeting of teachers, students, their parents and grandparents – celebrating together they may collect money for charity or support the school’s educational role,
- Excursions to places with especially charming scenery. The slogan is “to discover the genius of life”. Demonstration that reflection and silence give not only relaxation but also inner strength,

- “Every wall may become a gate” – individual reflection and optional sharing of one’s own thoughts in groups.

The core of the proposition of the life affirming upbringing is to show and remind the youth of the essential qualities of a human being (e.g. in a comparative way: “humane” and “inhumane” dispositions), leading to understanding of the phenomenon of life (in the phenomenological, not mechanical meaning). Therefore, people, animals, plants and objects should not be treated as existentially equal. All of them, however, should be given proper respect. Criticism of a human being’s destructive activity is advisable here. Human beings, though predestined to possess “higher” feelings and values, can learn a lot from animals or even plants, too. Genuine optimism of the teacher evaluating all “human things” is expressed in the following attitude: to affirm good and derive happiness from what is good – this is the deepest meaning of ethics and affirmative upbringing.

Conclusions

The proper presentation of the essence of life (as antinomy of affirmation and negation) to a young person leads straight to one’s natural acceptance. Acceptance with which every healthy person is born and which is creatively developed into secondary affirmation, earned with one’s own effort in the existence of one’s own personality. At the same time, the affirmation of life must be considered a human privilege, especially for individuals going through a formative phase of life as well as the moral obligation of the axiologically mature person. Noticing the peculiarity of all living things will be supportive to human beings in the process of life, giving them appropriate “shape”. Human beings have special privileges to affirm moral values and to use them to create a satisfactory “niche” for themselves. Affirmation of life, together with other humanist values such as: dignity, love, freedom, authenticity and responsibility, constitutes the perfect pedagogical alternative for nihilistic tendencies that are present in some aspects of social and civilised life.

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